

that sometimes engaged couples get lost in them for hours. On this occasion neither could be aware that on the other side Hubert Ellington was walking. He had been trying to reach Madge by the shortest way, and had got tangled up in the geranium beds.

"Jack, I don't know," sobbed Belle. "Sometimes I think I love him more than anybody else in the world, and then, again, I don't."

"Whom else do you love better, sometimes?" asked Jack.

"You," whispered Belle, and then she tore herself away and looked at him with horrified eyes.

"Jack, I shall go straight to Hubert and tell him what I let you do," she said tragically. "I am an engaged girl, and I let you kiss me!"

"Well, don't you suppose he has done the same, many times?" asked Jack angrily.

"I don't care. It isn't right, Jack, and it shall never happen again," said Belle desperately. "Oh, Jack, listen! I love you better than anybody. What a wicked girl I am! There!"

"Then you shan't marry him," said Jack firmly. "It is outrageous! A man of forty-five. Oh, Belle, if you aren't sure now, when do you think you ever will be?"

"Jack," said Belle firmly, "I am going to tell Hubert, and I am going to tell him, too, that I love him. He will never know. And after we are married he will make me care!"

They passed on, Jack arguing and expostulating, Belle maintaining stony silence, except where it was broken by spasmodic sobs. As for Hubert Ellington, he remained exactly where he was, between the geranium beds and the hedge.

To have pretended that he was madly in love with Belle Moran would have been self-deception. He was, however, sincerely attached to her, and the thought of making her his wife had been very dear to him. He was rich, and he had planned a home for her and her widowed mother, as well as a settlement which should

secure Mrs. Moran from want for the rest of . . . days. And now—

His little dream was ended. He knew that he would forget. But at any cost he must break the engagement. He was a man of kindly impulses, and the revelation gave him a sudden realization of something he had never thought of before; that he was a middle-aged man.

It was late when he reached the hotel. Dinner was ended and Belle was waiting for him.

"Hubert," she said, "mamma has come. She wants to see you."

"Wait a minute, dear," said Ellington. "I want to tell you something. Sit down."

Belle sat down and looked fearfully at him. He could see her breast rise and fall quickly, the breathe came between her half-opened lips.

"Belle," he said, taking her hand, "I am not going to meet your mother. I am going away. I am going to release you from our engagement. I may seem despicable and an eaves-dropper, but I was in the garden this afternoon, and—I heard."

Belle leaped to her feet. "Hubert," she cried, "I shall not release you. It is not honorable."

"It is honorable and right, my dear," he answered. "Now I am going to repair my mistake by going out of your life. You must let me go."

"You are the finest gentleman in the world," she murmured, almost overcome by the strength of her feelings. "Hubert, tell me one thing. Never mind our feelings. Is it for the best?"

He bowed his head.

"Then I release you," she breathed, and he turned to go.

But before he had gone two paces a woman came down the hall. One of those women in early middle life whose beauty and freshness seem only enhanced by the passing of the years. She came up and stopped in hesitation.

"Mother!" exclaimed Belle. "Hubert! Wait a moment. This is my